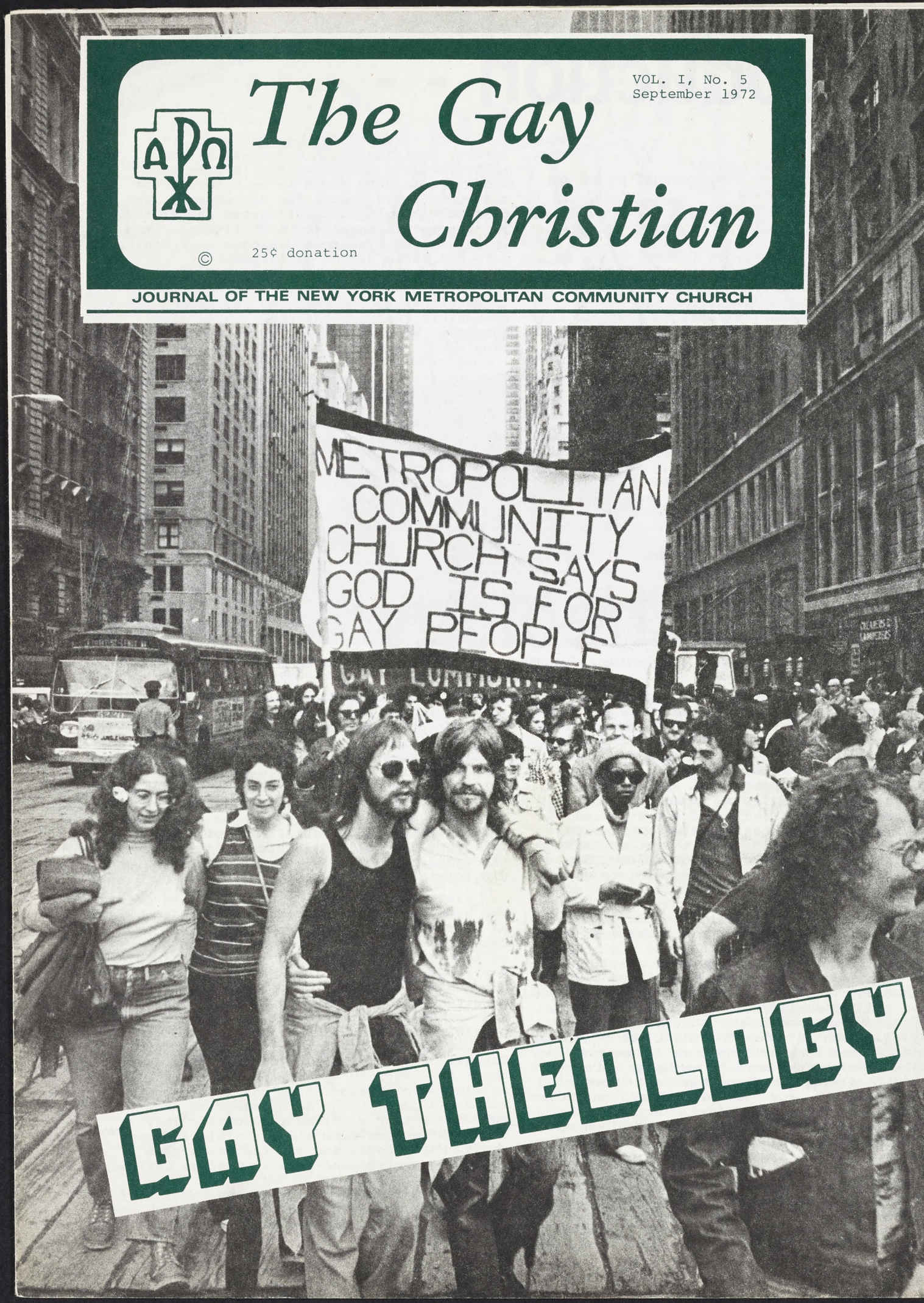
VOL. I, No. 5
September 1972

The Gay Christian

© 25¢ donation

JOURNAL OF THE NEW YORK METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH



GAY THEOLOGY

Introduction - - -

"GAY THEOLOGY!!
"WHAT WILL THEY WANT NEXT?"
THE EDITOR TRIES TO EXPLAIN WHAT HE THINKS WE'RE UP TO - - -

None of the writers in this issue is a professional academic theologian, although there are theologians who are gay and whose work reflects the alienation they have experienced. When it comes to explicit self-identification though, these people are still silent. Which leaves the field--and its responsibilities--to us. For while we are not tenured academics, the writers here share the attitude that being who we are has contributed to our views of conventional religion, and has sometimes made insights available to us that we might not otherwise have known. (For instance, the phrase "despised and rejected of men" strikes us in a way that it might not many Christians.) All of us have read theology and worked at it from time to time. So now we are attempting to do some ourselves to advance the self-understanding of our community.

This issue of The Gay Christian represents our first such undertaking, and it is predictably diffuse. But in time we should be able to focus in on a few of the more productive issues for discussion. We think the theological enterprise is one that is open to all intelligent Christians. And we think that classroom dialogue represents only one phase of the development of Christian thought. For we have also gained our insights on the street--in the bars--in the lonely hours when one gay person shares his feelings and experiences with another. We have learned a lot from the people who came to us looking for advice.

An editor is apt to have agreements and disagreements with his writers. Since the essence of theology is dialogue, I have taken the liberty of responding to the various articles in a piece of my own at the end, as well as giving my own ideas about where this discussion should go. We don't plan to have every issue of The Gay Christian be "heavy" theology, but from time to time we hope to take up this more abstract kind of discussion. We hope there is some substance here as well as rhetoric.

--r.b.

Open Theology

by Ellen Barrett

If I've sat through one discussion about the homosexual and the Church, I've sat through a hundred. My desk is crammed with notes and letters and sermons, mine and other people's, that all seem to be part of this peculiar something we've taken to calling a "Gay Theology". Something about all this writing and talking depresses me though. I come out of meeting after meeting, frustrated and unhappy, and it doesn't matter whether the participants are clergy or laity, straight or gay. I've heard a lot of good ideas, but they never seem to come together into any sort of whole.

I'm beginning to believe that the crucial factor in my frustration has nothing to do with the "gay" part of the issue, but with the theologizers' peculiar ideas of what theology is supposed to be and how it is supposed to function. Theology is defined as the study of God and God's relationship to the universe. Simple enough, certainly, and presumably broad enough to allow for all kinds of growth and exploration, but the more I hear theology talked about, the more it seems to have been redefined into something hard and inorganic that does not grow perceptibly well and moves only with incredible effort. At worst, it does not move at all, but must be blown up or laboriously razed every time a new problem needs to be dealt with.

These attitudes are part of the reason why any minority group, racial, sexual, or whatever, makes churchmen feel so threatened. Petrified theology is a defensive fortress whose keep can only house the great, gray mass of "average" people. The Church has a bad habit of burning saints for reasons of political expediency and only reluctantly rehabilitating them later, when the political climate allows the human being to be transformed and distorted into legend. We have not really come very far from the days when Jesus was framed by men afraid for their religious and political future. It is still expedient that one man--or one minority--die for the people.

Throughout history there have been people who have tried to stand against the dead hand of religious and civil authority. Most have either been eradicated or co-opted in one way or another. The only thing that makes our own day remarkable is the number of peoples who are coming into their self-awareness virtually simultaneously, and the power that modern media and technology put into the hands of the modern revolutionary. No wonder Authority trembles at the mention of the "Movement." For all of its internal rifts and dissensions, there is something awesome in the thought of so many people refusing to contribute their blood and bone to the maintenance of this rotting society's whited sepulchre. They demand attention from all who claim to care about human needs, and not the least from those who profess and call themselves Christians.

I have been as guilty as anyone else of playing the expediency game, swaying with the wind in all these discussions. I have fallen

Members of the New York and Philadelphia churches raise the banner in Central Park following the 1972 Christopher Street Parade.

(Tower News Service)

alternately for intricate theologies of liberation and for the idea that Christianity has room for all kinds of people. If there is no longer to be any discrimination between Jew and Greek, slave and free, why should there have to be any need for all this contention from women, from blacks, from homosexuals, and others? There is truth on both sides. It is the context that distorts and fragments them, and until the contextual problem is resolved, or at least recognized, I cannot see how we can get very far at all in our search for this elusive Gay Theology.

It is true that God's love encompasses all people. Christ (though even at the beginning, not all Christians) has room for everybody. This restatement of the obvious would be a powerful argument against any separatist trend in theology were it not for one equally obvious fact. We live neither in the best of all possible worlds nor in a homogenous one. In the former, differences of race, of sexuality, of heritage and lifestyle would be as great a cause for rejoicing as the wonderful variety of spring flowers, and as little controversial. In the latter, all differences would have been truly purged away, obviating the whole problem.

As it is, we are stuck with an uneasily-balanced pecking order of prejudices and fear, necessitating some kind of link between the catholicity of the Good News and the unhappy fragmentation of the world as it is. No monolithic and immovable theology can embrace the whole family of God's people, hence the theologies of liberation.

There are dangers in theologies of liberation, too. The fact that the Savior pictured in my mind when I pray looks more like a twentieth century lesbian than a first century man means a lot to me, but though it doesn't change the gist of Her/His message at all, it can make it nearly impossible with other people if I make an issue of the correctness of my vision as opposed to theirs. I don't have to give it up, just find some common denominator to make discussion a practical possibility.

I am not free, my brothers and sisters are not free, until we are all free. Too exclusive a concern with one's own freedom leads inevitably to the infringement of someone else's. Our finite nature makes it mandatory for anyone involved in the fight for liberation to concentrate on the area of his/her greatest oppression (and therefore greatest concern and expertise), but unless we can stand back occasionally and try to get a more complete view of the whole struggle for human liberation, we will mistake the means for the end and be doomed to futility and frustration.

Theology is not dogma. It cannot be some solid, immutable body of belief and be true to its definition. Certainly such a vision of theology cannot hope to feed the hungers of an ever-changing world. The

liberal who says there is no problem is speaking from a theology whose world is not the world we have to live and die in. The would-be liberationist is equally guilty of thinking of theology in monolithic terms, the only difference being that he admits to being incapable of dealing with the whole of it and must therefore saw off his bit to work on, reshape, and expand.

The result of very much of this handling is that the pieces will never fit back together in the same old way, and for that I suppose we ought to thank them, if only they wouldn't keep trying to do it anyway. Unfortunately they rarely look around at the hacked-up pieces and decide to junk the whole mess in favor of trying to find a new kind of theology.

Actually, what is needed is nothing so radical as a new theology. A return to what theology should be all about--a more truly radical move in the long run--is what we need. This world is not the place to be looking for security, for safe places to hide from the challenges of living. The God who says "he who loses his life shall find it" is not a God for the safety-loving. Christianity is a continual challenge, and it demands a growing, stretching, unafraid theology, one that is an organic whole, both living, with all that implies of development and change, and one, encompassing the needs of many different peoples, but at the same time undivided.

Toward an Unnatural Theology

by Steve Wolfe

> "Women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women, and were consumed with passion for one another." Romans 1:26,27 (emphasis added)

St. Paul's condemnation is not a frontal attack on homosexuality since he assumes his audience shares his aversion to it; he is using homosexuality here as an illustration of his premise that man is alienated from his God-given nature. Because mankind departed from the source of his being (exchanging the worship of the Creator for the creature--vs. 25) therefore mankind has lost touch with its own nature, exchanging natural sex for unnatural.

The Christian notion of natural law has been battered on many fronts in recent centuries, and the crusade for gay liberation is only part of a reshaping of the whole concept of human nature currently going on.

* * *

Contemporary technology emphasizes human discontinuity with nature (or perhaps from an ecological perspective, war against it). Our environment continues to be increasingly dominated by human invention which alienates us from the so-called "natural environments" of other animals. As humanity expands its ability to explore, control and manipulate the physical universe, it becomes more difficult to describe behavior as "natural" or "unnatural." Is it "natural" that we go to the moon--or even fly at all?

Is man alienated from nature by the Fall, or by his very creation itself? In Genesis 2:7 God sculpts man from the dust breathing "into his nostrils the breath of life" ("breath", "word" and "spirit" deriving from the same Hebrew root word). Both Genesis accounts of the creation of man testify to the uniqueness which separates him from the natural order.

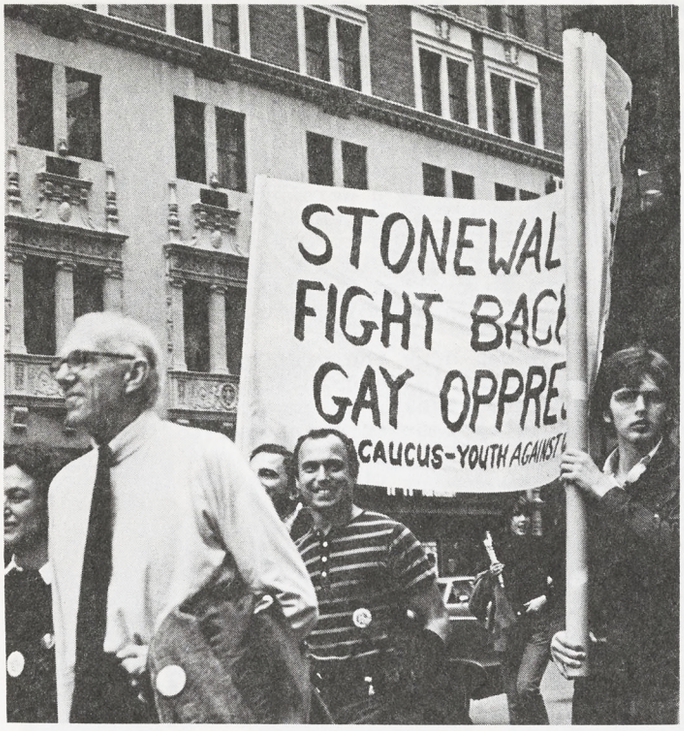
Historically, Christian theology has talked of the "image and likeness of God" in terms of man's reason. The human capacity to think has been made the symbol of our uniqueness. Yet this emphasis--like the natural law concept itself, a gift from the Greeks--distorts the Old Testament stress of concrete action over abstract being. It is the ability to do which characterizes divinity in the Old Testament. Thus in Exodus 3:13ff., in the story of the burning bush, the name which Moses obtains from God can be translated "I do" as well as "I am." Or "I cause to be" in the sense of "do." The sacred name of God itself symbolizes the freedom from being pinned down and defined by the natural order. Moses returned to the Egyptians with a paradoxical no-name. "Tell them 'I-do-whatever-I-do' has sent you." God characterizes himself as the one who sets his own limits and defines his own nature. This is the one in whose image and likeness mankind was made. It is the godlike freedom of self-determination which alienates us from natural laws and orders.

The Gay Christian

VOL. I, No. 5
September 1972

THE GAY CHRISTIAN, Journal of the Metropolitan Community Church of New York, Rev. Howard R. Wells, pastor; Roy Birchard, editor.

Worship services: Sunday evenings 8 p.m. at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Apostles, 300 Ninth Avenue at 28th Street, New York, N.Y. Phone: (212) 866-0265.



Dr. Spock takes a walk at the 1972 Christopher Street Parade.
(Tower News Service)

* * *

"Return to nature" is a slogan popular with environmentalists and some alternate-society advocates today. But the attempt to live on nature's terms also characterized the ancient religions of the middle east. The worship of the Baalim--the gods of nature which inhabited the special groves and high places of the Canaanites--was sharply condemned by the Hebrew prophets. For God was above and beyond the finite processes of the universe. Likewise man was created not to conform and submit to nature but to "have dominion over" the earth and its animal inhabitants. In the Garden of Eden story, man was to be the gardener. Naming the animals (Genesis 2:19) symbolized the human mission to direct the natural world about him. Rather than conformity to nature, images of conquest and control over nature are found throughout the Old Testament.

Nature's resistance to human control is symbolized in the curses at the end of the Garden of Eden story (Genesis 3:14-19). "I will put enmity between your offspring and the offspring of the woman," God says to the snake, "he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Because of Adam's disobedience, God planted the earth with thorns to confound human attempts to cultivate it. Because of Eve's disobedience, the urge to reproduce was complicated by the pains of childbirth. The whole scheme of an orderly universe under divine-human control was disrupted by the strife between God and his human "partners."

In this sense, St. Paul was following a Biblical theme when he traced the disorder of human life to man's alienation from God. However, the aim of divine-human reconciliation is to restore man's mastery of creation. Rather than submitting to nature's disorder, the Gospel calls man to transform and humanize the natural order.

The new man, redeemed by Christ, is not a mere recovery of the old innocence lost in Adam. The fruit of the tree of knowledge has been eaten, and the angel forever bars our return to Eden's simplicity. And yet Christ speaks of a second birth, becoming a child again. This new birth, however, requires a death to the old laws and conventions of nature. In order to achieve the self-regulating freedom which God intends for man, we must be transformed by God's overwhelming love embodied in the cross. Love's transformation of mankind dissolves the barriers of race, class, and sexual distinctions. The new man, no longer subject to the old laws of nature, walks in the freedom of God's spirit.

The result of the new birth is nothing less than the transformation of all creation. In Romans 8 St. Paul describes the air of expectancy throughout the universe, waiting eagerly for the human race to be converted so that the natural order itself can enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God. In the same spirit, Isaiah foresaw the day when nature would be set free from its own law, when "every valley (would) be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low."

The decline of the concept of natural law, adopted by Christianity from Hellenistic sources, opens the way for a much healthier view of all forms of sexuality. As a non-reproductive form of sex, homosexuality testifies to our God-given vocation to transcend the laws of nature. To the extent that we abuse our freedom in depersonalizing ways, both homosexuals and heterosexuals can exemplify the depth of human alienation from God. On the other hand, to the extent that our sexuality becomes an exercise in self-regulating love, we embody the spirit by which God intends to liberate, transform, and recreate his universe.

WHEN IT SHOULD BE

My hand on me
when it should be
touching
whoever you are,
whoever you will be,
touching you
with love.

And then,
my hand on you,
whoever you will be,
where it should be
touching you.

Because,
my hand on me
when it should be
touching love,
is only half a life.

--Dakota Jonson

Gay God, Gay Theology

by Rev. Howard R. Wells

As the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches continues to expand, its congregations find themselves confronted with several common problems, not the least of which are: (1) the frustration of reaching only a relative handful of gay people in America; and (2) the dawning realization that MCC cannot be just a gay carbon copy of the straight, institutional church if it is to maintain the spiritual fervor that give it birth.

I cannot believe that God would establish MCC to minister to only a minute part of the gay community in a few large cities. I am convinced that MCC's mission is to effectively minister to every gay person in a manner that is meaningful in the context of gay oppression Yet, when we look around and evaluate our efforts, we find the majority of our community still worshipping at the altar of the local gay bar. Often when we invite them to share in our fellowship at MCC, we receive either an apathetic stare or an angry "No!"

So we ask ourselves, "Where have we gone wrong?" I would suggest that we have not failed the gay community. Rather, as a fellowship of community churches not yet four years old, we are still searching for our identity as a Christian body that is reaching out into uncharted areas of ministry. We are still in the process of defining the scope and unique nature of that ministry. Our success to date is the fruition of our having embraced the radical hope that God does not regard our sexual orientation as sinful or sick. Because we acted out of what I call "gut faith", we now have over 30 congregations, only one of which is over three years old. Considering the challenges that we have faced and overcome, we have nothing to be ashamed of. We have only to keep moving forward as the Spirit would lead us.

Now that we have established some bases of operation, we must ask ourselves, "Where do we go from here?" We have learned from experience that we cannot emulate the practices of the straight church in an unquestioning manner. To do so would be to immerse ourselves in the same spiritual malaise afflicting those churches. So, where do we go? What must we do to effectively reach the bulk of this nation's gay community?

If MCC is to continue to grow and fulfill its destiny, we must seek ways to relate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the gay condition in America. Only by doing this, will we be able to develop effective strategy to expand our ministry. I think I am on safe ground when I say that no one chooses what sexual orientation he or she has; the only choice a person can make regarding his sexual orientation is whether he is going to respond to God's gift of sexuality by using it in a manner that enables him to realize his full human potential and, in so doing, to honor God.

Or one can deny the gift by using it in a manner that is dehumanizing, using it as an end unto itself, or engaging in sexual activity that is unnatural to the individual's sexual orientation. (I am thinking here of the closet case who gets involved in a straight marriage and fathers or bears children--all for the sake of social appearances and for the sinful hope that by engaging in straight sex, he or she will somehow become straight.) We need to remember the saying "What you are is God's gift to you; what you make of yourself is your gift to God." Therefore, we see that we have a natural rapport with God when we use, without fear, his good gifts to us.

But that rapport has wider implications than simply responding to our God-given sexual natures. God's concern for us, as an oppressed people, is also an essential aspect of that relationship, an aspect that is worthy of further consideration, an aspect that leads me to present the rather provocative concept of "gay God."

God never intended man to be burdened down with social conditions that would render him unable to respond to his full human potential. It is not God's plan for man to be oppressed, or to be cast into slavery, or to be treated by others as something less than a child of God. Indeed, the Bible is a witness to the fact that God identifies, and takes sides, with those persons who are caught in a situation of human oppression and who call upon his name. He is not a neutral God--He does take sides--the side of the oppressed. And when he does, he becomes strongly identified with them. Consider Israel.

When God led his chosen people from slavery in Egypt, he was not an uncaring, neutral God; rather, he was the God of Israel, enabling their social liberation from the condition of slavery. The intimate relationship between God and oppressed people is even more poignantly illustrated by the fact that Jesus himself was born into an oppressed minority under the yoke of Roman domination. And in the course of his ministry, he associated with and allowed himself to be identified with social

(LNS)

Gay activist demonstrators at Democratic National Convention in Miami. (LNS Women's Graphics Collective)

outcasts--Samaritans, lepers, unattached women, tax collectors and other agents of the Roman regime.

Jesus Christ chose to make the Jewish condition his condition by being born a Jew; he chose to make the condition of all oppressed people his condition by dying on the cross, and in so doing, he purchased freedom for them with his blood. In Luke 4:18-19, Christ articulates the nature of his ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Since the children of Israel emerged triumphant from Egypt, and Christ rose triumphant from the grave, we can safely state that the Biblical witness says that God is a God of liberation, who calls to himself the oppressed and abused and assures them that his righteousness will vindicate their suffering. It is the Bible that tells us that God became man in Jesus Christ so that his kingdom would make freedom a reality for all persons. This is the meaning of the resurrection of Christ. Man no longer has to be a slave to anybody but must rebel against all the principalities and powers which make his existence subhuman. To do less than rebel would be to sin against God. To resign ourselves to the oppressive status quo would be to rob Christ's sacrifice of meaning.

So what does this have to say to oppressed gay people today? It says that if we call on God to deliver us from our bondage, if we willingly and unequivocally place our lives in his hands, we can expect to be liberated and to be free to develop our full potential as human beings. It says that God has chosen to make the gay condition his condition; he is not neutral in this struggle but rather, is on our side.

As the enslaved Jewish people in Egypt called him the God of Israel, and today, as black people who are discovering their identity and oneness with God, are referring to him as their "black God," we, the gay community, have the right to refer to our liberator, our redeemer, as our "gay God." To say that God is gay means that he understands us and approves of the way he made us. To black people, God is black, and rightfully so. To women striving to become first-class citizens, She is a female God. He is the same God to all oppressed people. Their condition is his condition. The derogatory labels applied to the oppressed are the labels that must be given to him also.

I, for one, reject the God served by straights who oppress me and who, in their churches, debate whether I am human or sinful or sick because I dare to exercise my God-given homosexual identity. That is not the God I serve, and that is not the God whose revelations are witnessed in the Bible. A God who condones or is blind to the enslavement of gay people is not the God I know, but it is rather an oppressive

idol. I reject it and embrace God's identity with me as a gay person.

So where does this new concept of God lead us? It leads us to a new, better way of thinking about God and our relationship with him. It offers ground for reconciliation between God and the gay person who has bitterly rejected him, since the only God that person rejected was a straight idol of oppression, not the true Biblical gay God of liberation. It leads us to a new theology, a theology of liberation, a "gay theology."

GAY THEOLOGY

James Cone, the black theologian, says in his book A Black Theology of Liberation, "Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. This means that its sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that their inner thrust for liberation is not only consistent with the gospel, but is the gospel of Jesus Christ. There can be no Christian theology which is not identified unreservedly with those who are humiliated and abused. In fact, theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed."

Based on Cone's definition of Christian theology, we can define gay theology as a theology of liberation because it is a theology which arises from an identification of oppressed gays in America, seeking to interpret the Gospel of Christ in the light of the gay condition. It believes that the liberation of gay people is God's liberation.

Inevitably, questions pop up: Why do we need a gay theology? Why do we need a special way of expressing God's presence among gay people? Wouldn't a "general" or "universal" Christian theology devoid of sexual or racial references suffice for all people? Isn't a gay theology a separatist theology?

To respond, let me say that any "general" or "universal" Christian theology submitted to gay people is nothing more than a straight theology, with no place for gay people to realize their full human potential as children of God. By ignoring the plight of gay people, Christian theology has reduced us to the status of "things", "nonbeings." By remaining silent in the face of blatant gay oppression, any acceptable Christian theology is rendered a sexist theology.

If there is any doubt as to the validity of this charge, consider the product of a "general" or "universal" Christian theology--the erotophobic attitude of the institutional church toward gays. Such a straight theology only presents to the gay person the unacceptable option of being the "good queer", the homosexual who stays in his place, meek and mild, a gay Uncle Tom, the "homo" who avoids any public reference to his sexual orientation in the company of nice, polite straight people, the gay who is the analogy of the Negro trying to be white. Instead of hiding it, to be human in a condition of social oppression always involves affirming that which the oppressor regards as degrading, not pretending that it does not exist or trying to hide it! For gay people, that means affirming our sexuality loud and clear! Such affirmation will be our salvation.

A creative and helpful gay theology would:
(1) show us how to break out of the subhuman identity mold we have been forced into by society and particularly, by the "Christian" church;
(2) reveal God's plan and strategy for liberation of the gay community;
(3) provide us with a Biblical basis that would assure us that God is indeed with us and for us. He is not neutral; and
(4) provide us with a general direction for more clearly defining the unique nature of our pioneering ministry.

Armed with a new concept of God, a new theology, and a clearer sense of direction for the gay church, we will find ourselves adequately prepared to radically expand the physical and spiritual scope of our Christian ministry. We will be able to effectively challenge anyone or anything that would deny us our humanity. We will come to discover our true, unique identity and as oppressed people will come to know who we are. We will no longer be able to tolerate oppression of ourselves or anyone else. This is the key to self-identity. This is what Paul Tillich calls the courage to be, i.e. the courage to affirm one's being and humanity in spite of those elements of existence which threaten being. It is the courage to be gay and proud in spite of straight oppression and understand what that affirmation really means. This is the meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it applies to gay people. This is the focal point on which we must concentrate as we seek to make this church meaningful to more than a handful of people in a handful of cities.

"God identifies, and takes sides, with those persons who are caught in a situation of human oppression..."

O God, give us
serenity to accept what cannot be changed,
courage to change what should be changed,
and wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

-- Reinhold Niebuhr

Where Do We Go From Here?

by Roy Birchard

Brief responses to these three papers, and my own views about where we should be going with this discussion follow:

OPEN THEOLOGY: ELLEN BARRETT

I have trouble grabbing on to what special contribution she feels gays might make to theology. I gather that she feels theology should be open to new insights and yet somehow retain the kind of over-arching Catholic unity that lifts the individual believer (whether liberationist or "average" type) out of his parochial pew. This is probably valid advice both to critics who find gays separatist and to alienated gays who would dismiss, out of hand, main-line Christian teaching, but does it take us anywhere new itself?

TOWARD AN UNNATURAL THEOLOGY: STEVE WOLFE

I have my doubts about taking on debate with the Church from this angle. Admittedly, traditional teaching has regarded gays as "unnatural." But empiricism did a more devastating job on the natural law concept than we could. Actually, great varieties of sex are apparently "natural" in nature. I agree that the real question seems to be how do humans, through the exercise of freedom and love, transcend nature.

I think we should object to being used as homiletical examples by our "liberal" Christian friends who find us simply one more instance of the ways that man is alienated from God. ("Lepers, queers, wars, etc.") The story of the Tower of Babel is perhaps more appropriate if one is cataloguing forms of alienation.

A final question: If being gay is "natural" to gay people, is being gay testimony "to our God-given vocation to transcend the laws of nature" or simply observance of them? Again, the real question seems to be, How do humans, through the exercise of freedom and love, transcend nature?

GAY GOD, GAY THEOLOGY, GAY CHURCH: HOWARD WELLS

The introduction of the notion of "gay God" has a certain beneficial shock value. ("I think of Her as an eighteen-year-old black lesbian," I once heard someone say.) And I think Wells is Biblically sound when he sets out God's identification with the suffering and oppressed, revealed most fully in the ministry of Jesus. Further, I think "gay theology" is as viable as any other of the "theologies of liberation." He has shown that one can read James Cone and replace the word "black" with the word "gay."

But having done this, I wonder how much this tells us about the specifics of the gay experience, or how a gay theology of liberation might differ from an ethnic theology, and what special insights it might have to offer to the larger Church. Indeed, if we think of theology as being, in part, the writing-down by one person of the shared experience of a church-community (something that is not clear in any of these papers) this may be something that can be done only with the passage of time. But I would not want to press this to the point that I felt nothing theological could be said now.

A final reaction I might offer to this piece would be that I have the impression that Wells is assigning all the homophobic sins of institutional Christianity to the charge of theology. The result is that I lose touch with what his operating definition of theology might be. This seems to muddy the waters. I think there is a need in this discussion for a clearer distinction between traditional Church teachings on sex and family patterns--which usually come under the purview of Christian ethics--and theology proper.

I also think a certain amount of sympathy is called for the "average" uptight Christian who is afraid of sex in general and has only the fuzziest notion about what gays are. (For if She may be that "eighteen-year-old black lesbian", He may also be a Presbyterian commuter; there are many forms of oppression.)

SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE ? ? ?

My impatience with everybody else's views (suggested, I suppose, in my reactions to them) arises from a desire to move our discussion beyond simply justifying our right to exist as practicing Christians with some kind of un-alienated breathing space within the Catholic Church Universal. What kind of contribution can gay Christians make to the gay community? What kind of

(continued on page 10)

I GET LOVERS

I get lovers.
What I want is friends.
("I can't leave too abruptly"
"They won't let go of me")
Afraid to let go,
Scared to offend,
I shower them with favors,
caress old wounds.

"Men should be kind"
--this is too simple''
Men should be kind
and careless in caressing.

Those who let go
let go so willing.

-- D.M. Stroud

peculiar insights can the gay experience offer to the Christian Church?

I think the most pressing need apparent from our "theology" papers, is the need to find a genuinely creative focus for discussion. What is the catalytic subject to focus on? Having agreed, more or less, with the outlines of Wells' adoption of the theologies of liberation, I don't feel a great need to re-think theology, Christology, soteriology, or even ecclesiology. So what should we focus on?

To gain a little historical perspective--In 19th century America there were four major foci of religious discussion: 1. the need for individual religious experience, or conversion (the validity of revivals and evangelism); 2. slavery; 3. Darwin's theories and their relation to the way the believer understood the Creation stories in the Book of Genesis (the rise of the historical-critical Biblical interpretation); 4. within Roman Catholicism, the need to examine the role of that church in a pluralist land where church and state were separate. Where any individual believer stood on one or more of these issues went a long way in defining his identity whtin the Christian camp. These were the bones that Christian dogs worried.

Since Stonewall, gay Christians have focused their energies on two major points: 1. church organization--the setting-up of separate congregations by MCC and other groups, and the formation of gay caucuses within religious bodies such as Dignity, the Unitarian-Universalist Gay Caucus, etc. Also, the thinking, planning and propaganda that has gone into this basic church organization; 2. the ordination question. This has mainly been brought up by Chuck Lamont within the Methodists and by Bill Johnson in the United Church of Christ, though there are other parties in the wings.

Lately, particularly in the gay congregations that have completed building campaigns and the basic organizational work, there has been a kind of uneasy "What next?" Howard Wells mentioned this in his article.

I think the real creative place for thinking right now is in the realm of life-styles, focusing on the "sexual ethic" and "living patterns" sections of the field of Christian ethics. I think there is great potential for the development of creative, new patterns of human association, and a lot of human energy floating around right now that could be channeled into this.

Let's take another look backwards historically. Over the course of two millennia, the Church has encouraged and promoted a number of quite different "Christian" lifestyles (to pass over the whole matter of Hebraic polygamy). In the beginning, they experimented with a commune (Acts 5:32ff.). They also celebrated the careers of a number of individual hermit monks (like Saint Anthony). In time, the regular clergy adopted celibacy, and then celibate monastic communities were set up. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, sequential monogamy was promoted, perhaps best embodied in the culture of the Protestant parsonage. The American frontier culture employed a family farm as a basic economic and social unit, organized around a larger town pattern.

In our own time, this was modified into the suburban pattern and apartment house living, the basic sexual pattern still presupposed being sequential monogamy. Now, people seem to be feeling, it is time for some sort of readjustment, the hoisting of some new sort of ideal. What is our place in all this? What are our needs? What has happened to us?

Though theoretically always suppressed, gay people have been busy in this century establishing social patterns and erecting social institutions. Gay women seem to have worked somewhat more comfortably within the social patterns erected for monogamous heterosexuals; or so some of them tell me. Most lesbians, I have been told, live a settled, private homelife, with less of the cruising and bar-hopping that male homosexuals practice. Those whom I've talked with say they are apt to feel more oppression as women than as gay women, and they have functioned more comfortably within the Women's Liberation movement, though they have had to do battle for recognition and legitimization by their straight sisters.

Both men and women gays, however, seem to have undergone a certain amount of ghetto-ization in large cities, and this is observ-able at resorts like Cherry Grove where there is an increasing population of gay women. Gay men have ghettoized more noticeably: Polk Street in San Francisco, and Christopher Street in New York are famous all over the world. Certain trades and fields of employment have tradit-ionally been accepting, or have been made so: airlines (Churchill once remarked that the British navy operated on "rum, buggery and the lash"), the diplomatic service, to some extent the military, teaching, the clergy, publishing,

compliments of
Beacon Baths
227 East 45th Street, 11th Floor
New York City, Phone 687-0322

the theatre, arts and culture in general. (My hairdresser is straight, and I've always been a little suspicious of that stereotype.) Also social clubs like the cycle clubs which are very touchy about being labeled gay, what with a macho image and all.

Within living memory, baths and bars have been set up, and for all our unhappiness with them, I don't think we would want to do without them--especially in smaller towns and cities. Since Stonewall, we have seen a proliferation of political clubs and campus gay groups. With The Advocate and Gay we now have a national gay press. Also a National Coalition of Gay Organizations that took on the Democratic National Convention this summer. That's quite a catalogue! To say nothing of the books, plays, movies and cultural styles created by, and in varying degrees, celebrating the gay experience.

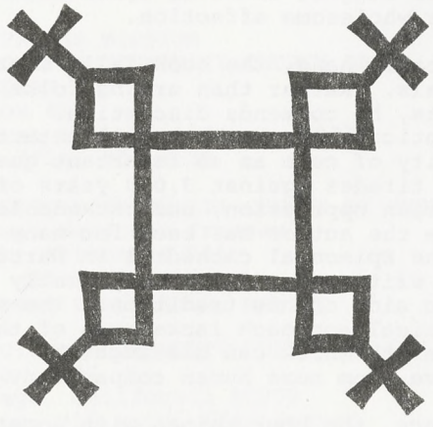
So where do we go from here? I think we in the gay churches should take to heart Craig Rodwell's caution in his article "God and Gay Lib" in the June 1972 QQ: avoid duplicating the institutions of the straight churches, particularly an unexamined endorsement of heterosexual marriage.

We have toyed some with creating a "liturgy of coming out"--a socially-useful religious ceremony that would mark the gay person's passing into a new phase of her/his life, invoking the support and blessings of God in the same way that one asks God's blessing through a baptism, funeral or bar mitzvah. We have also tried to keep our minds open, because "separatist" churches have had some powerful contributions to make, i.e. most of the "American" music that the whole world listens to arose out of the music of the black, American churches. A large part of the Soul we admire is music, and Aretha is a preacher's daughter.

But what do gay people want? There is one area where, if I am hearing things right, there is apparently a lot of tension, desire, hope, and room for development. I mean in love relationships. Some few gay people seem truly to be best off being solitary, living by themselves and meeting their physical and emotional needs in the bars and baths and other social settings that provide the classic one-night stand. Another few seem to have worked out a satisfying and agreeable relationship with a single lover. But if I am hearing the thing I think I'm hearing, there is a large mass of gays who have a great desire for a lover-relationship, who envy very much those heterosexual couples who seem to have established loving marriages--but so many of us seem unable to bring this off. At least for any length of time. If Martin Hoffman (The Gay World) is an accurate reporter of what gay people tell their shrinks, the greatest single unmet desire gay males have is this search for a long-term lover.

Why is this? Do people really want this, or only think they do? Do people want this at times, and then succumb to their Faustian, Western individualist, Don Juan desires? Are people prevented from doing this by the guilt and misdirected self-hatred inculcated by straight society? What is it we want?

I don't suppose I am going to get any final or absolutely conclusive answer. History is rarely that clear. But such questions are not met in a vacuum. Human life patterns are affected by things like ecological balance, need for population, Industrial Revolutions and the simple wearing out of our shared dreams about what society should be. What is a Christian lifestyle? We know that it is a loving and respecting pattern--of onesself and the other. But at different times in history there have been forms developed and provided by the Church, and these forms were useful and appropriate for many people for long periods of time. I suspect we have come to another such historical juncture, that gays have been called out of the "monogamous" mainstream, and that maybe it is our job to figure out a new Benedict's Rule for this age and time. If so, rabble on, O Spirit!



WHOLE CLOTH

Who else am I
besides who I'm supposed to be?

Your head against my shoulder, holding you,
I am your father-mother.
Sometimes you're mine.
And then sometimes, comrades,
buddies, if you will,
lovers,
friends.

Who else am I?
Because of you,
I'm more
than ever I could hope to be.

--Dakota Jonson

THE POEMS BY DAKOTA JONSON are from the collection We Gotta Love One Another Right Now, Wegloarn Press, 1972, and available through the Oscar Wilde Memorial Book Shop, 291 Mercer Street, New York, N.Y. 10003.

"Just a Little More Light"

WHAT ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?(A Youth Forum Book) by Clinton R. Jones (Thomas Nelson, Inc., New York and Nashville, 1972)

As the latest in a series of teen religious discussion books, this volume may create something of a shock. The author presents no simplistic explanations for the cause of homosexuality, remains skeptical about the possibility of a "cure," and holds out the hope that it is more possible than ever before for people to lead healthy homosexual lives. Even the cover tries to suggest in vivid color the potential for wholesome affection.

On the other hand, the book falls short of militant ideals. Rather than urging folks out of the closets, he commends discretion. Although skeptical, the author still entertains the possibility of cure as an important question. There are no tirades against 3,000 years of Judaeo-Christian oppression, understandable perhaps since the author has been for many years a canon of the Episcopal cathedral in Hartford. He obviously writes more from the priestly than the prophetic side of his tradition. The soundly reasoned clinical approach lacks much of the candor and warmth which can distinguish Christian love from mere human compassion.

On balance, the book shines with something more than the modest hope expressed in the preface "to let in just a little more light." For a Bible publishing house, it is a daring venture and could be of considerable value to those still swinging on the closet door.

There is one small criticism which pertains to only half the human race. Summarizing the range of human sexual feelings on page 1, the author makes no reference to the erotic potentials for women. Clearly the years spent counseling in the military and boys schools have predisposed him toward male homosexuality. If Jones feels unqualified to speak of lesbian love, it should have been stated more clearly in the text. Exploration of the whole range of male and female consciousness belongs in one of the future volumes in this series.

--Steve Wolfe

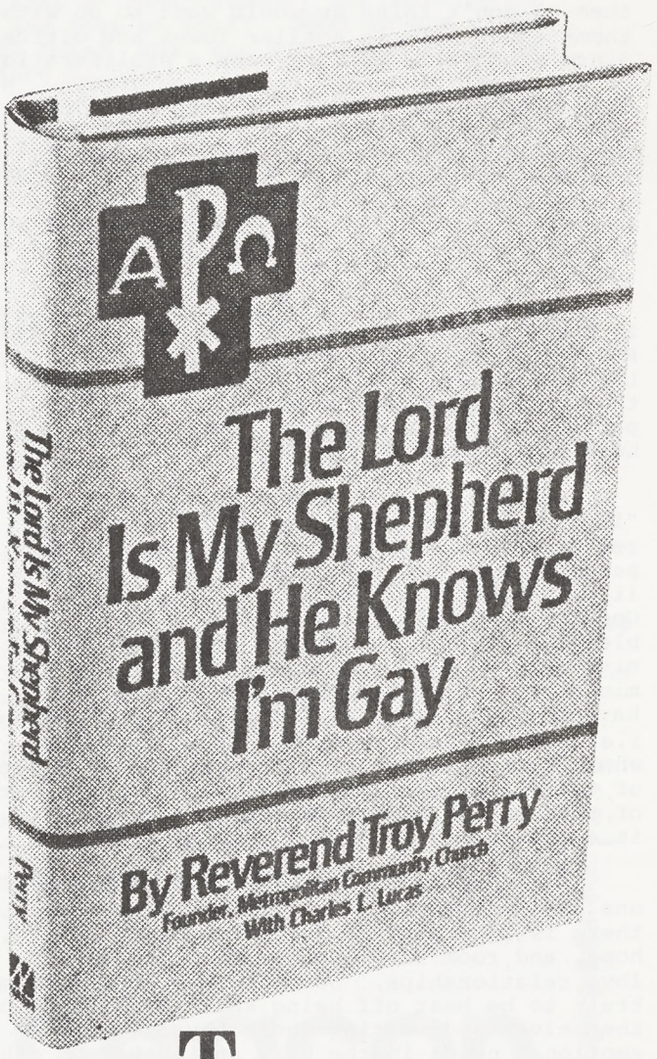
MESSAGE TO LITTLE JOHN

So there you are with Richard Nixon
on the Front Page of The Times.
Famous, fleetingly.
You struck a blow for liberation.

I remember you from other times
-- dances, meetings, the street.
How many pounds of militant rhetoric
did you absorb before you exploded
just this way?
Maybe they'll make a movie about you.

You certainly did get our attention.
But where do you file the used-up extras?

--rb


The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay
By Reverend Troy Perry
Founder, Metropolitan Community Church
With Charles L. Lucas
The Lord Is My Shepherd
Perry

This is the frank and revealing portrait of a man, the Reverend Troy Perry, pastor and founder of a church, lover of God . . . and also a homosexual. Here he shares his own life story with the world – his personal feelings and hurts, his current struggle to reform today's ridiculous and outdated sex laws – in the hopes of creating a greater understanding among those who read it. *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay.*

$7.95 at your bookstore or from

NASH Publishing Corporation

9255 Sunset, Los Angeles 90069 • A BFL Communications Company

Directory of the Universal Fellowship of METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

BOARD OF ELDERS:
Rev. Troy D. Perry
Rev. John H. Hose
Rev. Richard A. Ploen

2201 South Union Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90007

ALABAMA-FLORIDA-GEORGIA DISTRICT CONFERENCE

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF ATLANTA
P.O. Box 54763
Atlanta, Georgia 30308
Phone: (404) 636-5101
Rev. John Gill, pastor

CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
P.O. Box 1119
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33302
Services: 1765 N.E. 26th Street
Phone: (305) 791-2630
Rev. Ted Callaway, Interim Pastor

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF MIAMI
P.O. Box 5077
Miami, Florida 33131
Services: 3901 N.W. 2nd Street
Phone: (305) 754-9506

FIRST METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF TAMPA
P.O. Box 1063
Tampa, Florida 33602
Services: 2904 Concordia Street
Phone: (813) 839-5939
Rev. Lee J. Carlton, pastor

ARIZONA-SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DISTRICT CONFERENCE, REV. HOWARD WILLIAMS, DISTRICT COORDINATOR

TRINITY MISSION
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
P.O. 762
Colton, California 92324
Phone: (714) 825-9510
Rev. H.S. Young, interim pastor

CHRIST CHAPEL METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF COSTA MESA
1259 Victoria Street
Costa Mesa, California 92627

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF LOS ANGELES
2201 South Union Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90007
Phone: (213) 748-0123
Rev. Troy D. Perry, pastor

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF LONG BEACH
1105 Raymond Avenue
Long Beach, California 90802
Phone: (213) 434-1944
Rev. Jon Bullock, pastor

PALM SPRINGS MISSION
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE DESERT
P.O. Box 493
Cathedral City, California 92234
Phone: (714) 325-7829

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF PHOENIX
1426 East Maricopa Freeway
Phoenix, Arizona 85002
Phone: (602) 271-0125
Rev. James Cunningham, pastor

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF SAN DIEGO
P.O. Box 8205
San Diego, California 91202
Services: 906 North 47th Street
Phone: (714) 264-7351
Rev. John Hose, pastor

TUCSON MISSION
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
Contact: MCC Phoenix

COLORADO-LOUISIANA-TEXAS DISTRICT CONFERENCE, REV. RON CARNES, DISTRICT COORDINATOR

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF DALLAS
P.O. Box 1344
Dallas, Texas 75221
Services: 4015 Normandy
Phone: (214) 946-4354
Rev. Richard Vincent, pastor

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF DENVER
P.O. Box 18816
Capitol Hill Station
Denver, Colorado 80218
Services: 1400 LaFayette
Phone: (303) 244-1110
Rev. Ron Carnes, pastor

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF GREATER NEW ORLEANS:
P.O. Box 50081
New Orleans, Louisiana 70150
Services: 604 Kernville Street
Rev. David Solomon, pastor

OKLAHOMA MISSION
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
P.O. Box 20635
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73120
Phone: (405) 848-5066
Rev. Bob Evans, interim pastor

DIRECTORY OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

(continued from page 13)

SALT LAKE CITY MISSION
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
P.O. Box 11607
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111
Services: 5695 13th East
Phone: (801) 466-6865
Rev. Robert Buckley, interim pastor

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF HAWAII
P.O. Box 1116
Kaneohe, Hawaii 96744
Services: 2500 Pali Highway, Honolulu
Phone: (808) 247-2738
Rev. Ronald Hanson, pastor

GOOD SHEPHERD PARISH
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
P.O. Box 285
Chicago, Illinois 60690
Services: 3342 North Broadway
Phone: (312) 248-1525
Rev. Arthur Green, pastor

PRINCE OF PEACE PARISH
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
2024 West Highland Avenue
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53233
Phone: (414) 964-4733
Rev. Paul Sydman, pastor

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF NEW YORK
415 West 115th Street, Apt. #1
New York, N.Y. 10025
Services: 300 Ninth Avenue at 28th Street
Phone: (212) 866-0265
Rev. Howard Wells, pastor

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA
P.O. Box 8174
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19101
Phone: (215) 561-3881
Rev. Keith Davis, interim pastor

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF
WASHINGTON, D.C.
705 7th Street, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20003
Phone: (202) 547-2773
Rev. Paul Breton, pastor

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA DISTRICT CONFERENCE,
REV. JAMES SANDMIRE, DISTRICT COORDINATOR

FRESNO MISSION
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
542 Bond Street
Fresno, California 93702
Services: 1326 N Street
Phone: (209) 264-5476
Rev. Paul Van Hecke, pastor

EAST BAY METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
440 Santa Clara Avenue
Oakland, California 94610
Phone: (415) 832-2581

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO
P.O. Box 99369, Station O
San Francisco, California 94109
Services: Gold Mine Drive and Diamond Blvd.
Phone: (415) 433-6836
Rev. James Sandmire, pastor

SAN JOSE MISSION
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
P.O. Box 24126
San Jose, California 95154
Phone: (408) 266-7872

NATIONAL BOARD OF HOME MISSIONS

DETROIT MISSION
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
P.O. Box 1917
Northland Station
Southfield, Michigan 48075
Phone: (313) 777-1839
Rev. Robert Cullinan, interim pastor

PORTLAND MISSION
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
P.O. Box 42232
Portland, Oregon 97242

SEATTLE MISSION
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
P.O. Box 1323
Seattle, Washington 98102
Services: 128 16th Avenue East
Rev. Robert Sirico, interim pastor

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH of NEW YORK
360 WEST 28TH STREET NEW YORK, N. Y. 10001

TO

PRINTED MATTER